

Legislative Avenues and Considerations for Enacting Ethnic Studies Curriculum in  
Minnesota

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# Legislative Avenues and Considerations for Enacting Ethnic Studies Curriculum in Minnesota

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## About the Authors

The authors are graduate students in the Masters of Public Policy program at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. They researched and wrote this report as part of their capstone class aimed at addressing issues of equity in education policy, co-taught by Dean Laura Bloomberg and Professor Keith Mayes. Within this course, the authors selected a project proposal from Representative Fue Lee to conduct policy analysis on the feasibility of passing and implementing a statewide ethnic studies curriculum for Minnesota public schools. Although the authors all identify as white, our group worked with a diverse set of stakeholders, classmates, and the Persons of Color and Indigenous Caucus within the Minnesota Legislature to ensure racial and ethnic perspectives are centered within this research and recommendations.

## Special Thanks

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## **Executive Summary**

Ethnic studies refers to the instruction of public school students in kindergarten through grade 12 with curriculum centered on the knowledge and perspectives of ethnic or racial minorities. This paper argues that the best legislative avenue to implement ethnic studies across Minnesota involves a combination of expanding statewide social studies requirements and establishing an ethnic studies grant program. Including ethnic studies as an elective that can fulfill the statewide social studies graduation requirement will encourage students to enroll in the courses. An ethnic studies grant program, funded through an appropriation to the Minnesota Department of Education, will allow schools and school districts to apply for funding to develop ethnic studies curriculum and teacher training to effectively implement courses. Combined, this legislation will be the most politically feasible and effective avenue to begin establishing ethnic studies across the state of Minnesota.

Prior to pursuing legislation, it will be important to build a coalition of supporters. Grassroots stakeholders, influential education policy organizations, and policymakers from both parties should be engaged in shaping and advocating for the policy to increase the chances for legislative success. This coalition will provide support to overcome both political and implementation barriers the legislation will encounter. These recommendations are grounded in our findings of stakeholder interviews, analysis of Minnesota statutes, and policy analysis of the political context in Minnesota.

Ethnic studies legislation has been passed in three other states—California, Oregon, and Indiana—and multiple local schools districts, including Tucson, Arizona; Providence, Rhode Island; and the Minneapolis Public Schools. Ethnic studies programs allow students of color to see their experiences reflected in the curriculum. Given the racial disparities in Minnesota's educational outcomes, such as graduation rates, academic performance, and school adequacy, ethnic studies can help engage both students of color and white students. While still relatively new in K-12 public education, ethnic studies programs have proven effective at improving student engagement and academic performance and preparing white students to live in an increasingly diverse world. Ethnic studies curriculum in Minnesota public schools can have significant benefits for students, though enacting it will require addressing the needs of various stakeholders and gaining political and public support for any legislation.

## **Racial Disparities in Education in Minnesota**

The State of Minnesota has struggled for years to solve a decades-long trend: racial disparities in the state are at an all-time high, and they continue to worsen year after year.

The most basic measure of this achievement gap is in on-time high school graduation rates. The Minnesota Department of Education data from 2015 shows that there is a significant gap in these graduation rates between White students and their peers of color and indigenous students. While 88% of White students graduated on-time, only 69% of Hispanic students, 68% of black students, and 56% of American Indian students did so (MN Department of Education, 2016).

Beyond graduation rates, the quality of that education has also shown a demonstrable gap. The Minnesota Department of Education commonly cites 2013 data demonstrating achievement gaps in standardized test scores between white students and students of color and indigenous students. In math testing, for example, approximately 67% of White students were deemed proficient, compared to 58.8% of Hispanic students, 35.7% of American Indian students, and 32.6% of black students scoring as proficient. This gap has been consistent in subsequent years and continues to trouble state education workers who seek to close this gap (MN Department of Education, 2013).

There have also been significant disparities in school discipline. A Minnesota Department of Human Rights study found that students of color are twice as likely as their white peers to be suspended or expelled. The report states that “there is high correlation between having been suspended and poor academic performance, feeling disconnected from school, truancy, and a later risk of incarceration” (MN Department of Human Rights, 2018). Charter schools in the area have sought to rectify these issues by focusing on quality education for students of color, primarily in the Twin Cities area, with curriculum often seeking to reflect diverse students’ and their racial and economic backgrounds, but this solution is not necessarily applicable statewide.

These issues are compounded by a lack of a diverse teaching workforce and current curriculum that often does not reflect the history and experiences of people of color and indigenous people. However, advocates continue to push for educational equity in Minnesota, with efforts ranging from diversifying the teacher workforce to reducing disparities in student discipline. The Minnesota Department of Education is working to review its original 2017 racial equity goals, and new strategies are being discussed among grassroots stakeholders.

## **Ethnic Studies Outcomes**

Ethnic studies curriculum, and policies that either encourage or require students to take such classes, have been shown to have positive impacts on student learning and engagement.

### **Student Self Perceptions Reflected in Classroom Material**

Moving away from classroom curriculum that was built by and for students from a White, predominantly European background allows students of color to start seeing themselves in the material. As a National Education Association report supporting ethnic studies curriculum states, “as students of color proceed through the school system, research finds that the overwhelming dominance of Euro-American perspectives leads many such students to disengage from academic learning” (Sleeter, 2011).

### **Student Engagement and Academic Performance**

Ethnic studies courses in school districts have had a significant effect in improving academic performance and classroom engagement. In the San Francisco Unified school district, “researchers found that attendance for those encouraged to enroll in the class increased by 21 percentage points, GPA increased by 1.4 grade points and credits earned increased by 23 [...] There were positive effects across male, female, Asian and Hispanic groups of students, the study said, but the improved outcomes were particularly concentrated among boys and Hispanic students.” (Stanford University, 2016). In the Tucson Area School district ethnic studies program, “a study by University of Arizona researchers found a link between increased graduation rates and standardized-testing results for students who participated in the program from around 2006 to when it was dismantled in April 2012” (Galvan, 2015).

### **Benefits for White Students in an Increasingly Diverse World**

White students were also shown to have positive experiences when introduced to ethnic studies curriculum at an early stage, particularly in classroom engagement with their peers of color, better preparing them for the diversity they will likely experience in post-secondary institutions (Sleeter, 2011). White students also benefit from ethnic studies curriculum that improves critical thinking skills and imparts knowledge of absent narratives from the historically Eurocentric curriculum (Anderson, 2016).

## **Themes Within Existing Ethnic Studies Legislation**

Currently, three states, Oregon, California, and Indiana (four counting Montana’s American Indian curriculum policy) have passed ethnic studies laws and are in various stages of implementation (see Appendix B for summaries of existing K-12 ethnic studies programs). A number of local governing units have passed ethnic studies curriculum programs, including here in Minneapolis, MN. Many other states have tried to create ethnic studies policies and have failed, including Texas, Kansas.

### **Outcomes Pursued and Arguments in Favor**

Ethnic studies policies are frequently justified by the goal of improving outcomes for students and better representing students of color and their cultural history in their curriculum. The strongest research showing these outcomes is the 2016 Stanford Study of the San Francisco Unified School District, which showed that attendance, engagement, and standardized test scores improved for students who had previously been underperforming but were required to take ethnic studies courses.

### **Advocacy and Support**

Successful ethnic studies policies have frequently had more grassroots advocacy behind them, rather than top-down proposals. Students, nonprofit advocacy organizations, and higher education researchers have played a critical role in bringing this issue forward to policymakers and making their voices heard.

### **Mandates**

Some ethnic studies proposals have originated with the intention of pursuing ethnic studies coursework as a high school graduation requirement, yet almost every initiative softened the requirement or eliminated it altogether. Most states have instead focused on requiring the state to develop the curriculum and encouraging districts to use them in schools. However, other states have gone a different route, instead, requiring schools and districts to either offer the courses as standalone electives (Indiana, Montana) or incorporate the curriculum into existing social studies courses (Oregon).

### **Legislative Process of Changing Curriculum**

One of the most frequent missteps ethnic studies advocates and bill authors in other states have experienced is not directing legislation to use existing and proper curriculum development processes. An effort in Kansas failed due to a lack of Republican votes, which many in the party attributed to the bill not being approved by the state's Department of Education. Similarly, California Governor Jerry Brown initially vetoed the state's ethnic studies bill, citing the unprecedented move of not having the state Instructional Quality Commission develop the curriculum. That bill eventually passed after revisions instructing the IQC to do so.

### **Other Key Insights:**

- *Low Opposition Amounts:* There has been a low amount of opposition to bills or policies for ethnic studies curriculum. Most opposition has regarded funding (citing high initial costs of rollout) and arguments that ethnic studies courses will take students' time away from more important science and math courses.
- *Funding Inclusion:* Some states have included direct appropriations for ethnic studies curriculum and implementation. Notably, California and Indiana did not include any



appropriations. Others have included small amounts for research and curriculum development or have only funded small pilot programs in a small number of schools.

- *Slow Implementation:* Many states and local districts that have enacted ethnic studies policies did so recently and have not yet implemented or examined their outcomes.
- *Local Pilots:* Many states that have seen successful legislation for ethnic studies curriculum started with a local district that pursued similar standards and policies.
- *Opportunities to Increase Teachers of Color:* Typically, organizations that have been supportive of ethnic studies have also been supportive of increasing opportunities for teachers of color and to diversify the teaching profession.

## **Minnesota Context for Ethnic Studies Legislation**

Before working to pass statewide ethnic studies legislation in Minnesota, it is important to understand the context in Minnesota, interested stakeholders, and the political environment.

### **Education Policy is Locally Controlled in Minnesota**

Minnesota is a “local control” state, which means that authority over many core educational policies - including decisions about which course electives to offer - resides within local school districts. This significant local control can make statewide education mandates unpopular. Addressing this barrier to statewide ethnic studies legislation will require building grassroots support and ensuring participation and input from supportive stakeholders.

### **Relevant Stakeholders for Minnesota Ethnic Studies Legislation**

Given the context of local control over education policy in Minnesota and controversy over Edina Public Schools teaching racial equity in the classroom, it will be very important to get stakeholders involved in the ethnic studies legislative process early and often. The great number of stakeholders interested in the issue of K-12 ethnic studies curriculum will mean there are a variety of positions about what should be included or not included in the statewide legislation. Our team spoke with 19 stakeholders from across Minnesota and the country (see Appendix C for a complete list of interviewees) and heard a breadth of opinions.

Minnesota education advocacy nonprofits are generally supportive of ethnic studies, although their support will vary greatly by organization depending on the contents of the bill. For example, an unfunded ethnic studies mandate may be difficult for some organizations to support. Some nonprofits have already taken action to advocate for ethnic studies in Minnesota, such as the push for inclusive curriculum by the Equity Alliance MN, or the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership’s policy brief on the need for ethnic studies curricula.

Other public agencies, such as the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), various state councils for different ethnic and racial groups, and state associations for school boards, state administrators, rural associations, parents, and teachers will have strong opinions about any

statewide ethnic studies legislation. MDE and education associations may be resistant to change or to further education mandates that remove local control. It will be important to work with the needs and demands of each of these influential organizations.

Finally, in addition to building a supportive coalition of influential organizations (see Appendix D for other stakeholder organizations to engage), there are individuals you can mobilize to testify in committee in support of an ethnic studies bill. These individuals include students, teachers (such as Courtney Bell, a teacher at North High School), parents, school administrators, and professors of ethnic studies and related subjects (such as Professor Keith Mayes). Mobilizing these individuals and organizations will be important groundwork to lay to build grassroots support of an ethnic studies bill.

### **2018 Political Context in Minnesota**

There are currently two bills dealing with curriculum in the state that have elicited strong emotions and pushback from both parties, as well as community activists, parent, and student groups, and education reform advocates. These bills provide a glimpse of the process and discussion regarding any legislation pursuing ethnic studies in Minnesota.

- S.F. 2487: “Academic Balance in Schools” Bill would require districts to adopt policies that restrict advocacy and personal beliefs in academic settings and requires a policy of “academic balance” for issues in classrooms. The bill has been approved by the E-12 Policy committee in the Senate and has been referred to the E-12 Finance committee. The companion bill in the house (H.F. 3739) has not yet been heard in committee.
- H.F. 4117: Civics Graduation Requirement Bill would add a new requirement to social studies graduation standards to include a credit for a specific “course in government and citizenship in either 11th or 12th grade for students”, this would not change the number of credits required for social studies, it merely makes the civics course mandatory. It currently has no companion bill in the Senate.

Minnesota’s legislature is currently controlled by Republicans in both chambers, which gives them significant influence on the committee structure in both chambers. Committee Chairs in the House and Senate Education Committees (House: Education Innovation Policy and Education Finance; Senate: E-12 Finance and E-12 Policy) hold significant sway over any bills, allowing them to be brought up for hearings or for votes. As we’ve seen with the two major education bills above, the current Committee Chairs have been open to reform attempts and could be early advocates or supporters of a bill focused on ethnic studies curriculum across the state, if the benefits to students and impact on the achievement gap are demonstrated.

Another political consideration is that 2018 is an election year in Minnesota, with the entirety of the House up for reelection, while the Senate's four-year terms are not up for reelection until 2020. As the legislative session ends in the summer and campaigning begins, it may be difficult to convene potential bill sponsors until after the election cycle concludes. This also has the potential to upend the existing political dynamic, with control of the House potentially switching to the Democrat-Farm-Labor party, which may change the dynamic of support.

Governor Dayton is currently not seeking a third term, and the run for his successor already shows several candidates vying for the seat. This will be another political consideration, as the Governor has the power to sign or veto any legislation dealing with ethnic studies curriculum. The governor is a unique stakeholder, in that he or she will likely take significant input from the public, teachers, parents, legislature, and cabinet members, particularly the Commissioner of the Department of Education, who will almost certainly play a role in implementing any legislation that is passed.

## **Ideal Ethnic Studies Program Components**

According to stakeholders involved in the ethnic studies movement, there are some common components of an effective and rigorous ethnic studies program for students that centers the experiences and knowledge of racial and ethnic groups and creates effective and informed instructors.

- **Mandatory:** an ethnic studies program that is mandatory for students (such as a graduation requirement) will ensure all students have experience with ethnic studies and it will require schools to prioritize the course.
- **Stand-alone and infusion courses:** offering ethnic studies as a stand-alone course will ensure it remains rigorous and undiluted by competing priorities. Additionally, infusion courses (meaning all subject areas and instruction incorporate experiences and knowledge of racial and ethnic groups) will ensure an ethnic studies pedagogy is included in all subject areas.
- **Offer courses in 9th grade or before:** while infusing ethnic studies pedagogy into K-12 curriculum would be the best solution to close the achievement gap for students of color, beginning with stand-alone courses in 9th grade (or earlier in middle school) will aid students before the gap grows too large.
- **Context-specific curriculum developed by experts:** curriculum should be context-specific (for example, including information about Minnesota and local tribes) and developed by content-experts in partnership with teachers and students.
- **Ongoing professional development:** teachers of ethnic studies courses should be required to undergo ongoing professional development training to ensure they understand ethnic studies content and pedagogy.
- **Require ethnic studies in teacher training programs:** new teachers in Minnesota should be required to take an ethnic studies course before completing their training.

- **Fund the ethnic studies program:** all ethnic studies programs should be well funded to support professional development for teachers and other resources for implementation.

## **Recommendations for Ethnic Studies Legislation in Minnesota**

**Our Recommended Legislative Proposal:** Social Studies Credit Fulfillment and Grant Pilot Program Combination

### *Social Studies Credit Fulfillment*

Relevant Statute: [Statute 120B.024.2 - Credit Equivalencies](#)

Specify that an Ethnic Studies course may fulfill a 0.5 social studies credit requirement as part of Minnesota statewide graduation requirements. Current requirements include social studies courses in history, world history, geography, or government and citizenship; or a combination of these academic standards as approved by the district.

### *Grant Pilot Program*

Similar to the approach taken by [Statute 120B.23 - Violence Prevention Education Grants](#), with a different funding mechanism, through an appropriation to MDE from the general fund.

Add a new section to relevant statute(s), that requires the Commissioner of Education to establish an Ethnic Studies grant program to enable a school district, an education district, or a group of districts to develop and implement (or to continue) an ethnic studies program.<sup>1</sup>

Allowable uses for these funds could include: teacher professional development; administrative efforts directly tied to promoting awareness of and/or enrollment in ethnic studies courses; development or revision of ethnic studies courses; evaluation of the effectiveness of ethnic studies courses on student outcomes; or administrative efforts to align ethnic studies course offerings with required academic social studies standards. To the extent possible, the curriculum should be developed in consultation with content experts.

This approach has significant benefits in overcoming barriers for districts in offering ethnic studies courses, including student scheduling, teacher development, curriculum development, and associated costs:

1. Student schedules currently prioritize required courses or courses that fulfill those elective requirements. This bill would make it easier for students to choose ethnic studies courses a consideration among other options.

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<sup>1</sup> This will allow districts such as Minneapolis Public Schools, Willmar Public Schools, and others to continue their ethnic studies program by receiving grant funding from MDE, while encouraging additional districts to build their own program.

2. Teachers in schools and districts that participate in the pilot program will have access to training and development to help them teach ethnic studies courses, which are often challenging both emotionally and logistically for all students and teachers. This also has the benefit of helping white teachers, who are eager to incorporate ethnic studies into their curriculum, bring such coursework to fruition with support.
3. Districts will not need to develop their own curriculum and can leverage context experts and resources through MDE to create curriculum in this grant program.
4. The costs associated with bringing on additional teachers, developing the ethnic studies curriculum and training teachers will be covered by this pilot program.

This approach, however, does need specifics before the bill can be considered for inclusion in any session. Specifics like exact costs for the pilot program, who will define the standards for the curriculum, and what training qualifies can be directly stated in the bill language, or they can be left to MDE to determine in the near future. (See Appendix E for proposed bill language.<sup>2</sup>)

The key considerations for this approach are:

- **Politically Feasible:** Education stakeholders tend to favor voluntary programs with funding to aid implementation. This will be especially true for school districts who have already tried implementing ethnic studies but run into barriers when students couldn't fit it into their schedule or the administration of the program cost too much.
- **Few Implementation Barriers:** There are precedents and a straightforward process for the components of this approach: administering grant programs to districts to support the development of academic programs and amending the statute to allow new courses to count towards existing academic standards requirements.
- **Target Impact to Grantees, Not Statewide:** The impact will be narrower and more targeted since it will be mainly within the districts who receive a grant and are already somewhat open to pursuing ethnic studies curriculum.
- **Potential to Raise Awareness for Ethnic Studies:** The established funding pool may limit the number of districts participating, which makes this approach less publicly visible. However, evaluating the pilot programs and reporting on their results has the potential to increase public awareness and support for ethnic studies curriculum.

## Two Alternative Legislative Approaches

### *Require an Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement*

Relevant Statute: [Statute 120B.024.1 - Graduation Requirements](#)

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<sup>2</sup> The proposed bill was developed by Minnesota House Research, in consultation with our team and Representative Lee in April 2018. It includes additional sections beyond our recommendation, on revising social studies standards and requesting the Professional Educator and Licensing Standards Board (PELSB) to review teacher preparation programs in Minnesota on their incorporation of ethnic studies. The proposed bill language will be reiterated with Representative Lee and other stakeholders.

This option would make ethnic studies courses a graduation requirement for all students in Minnesota, by adding a 0.5 credit ethnic studies course requirement to the existing statewide social studies graduation requirements. Currently, students must take 3.5 credits in social studies to graduate, encompassing at least United States history, geography, government and citizenship, world history, and economics.

The key considerations for this approach are:

- **Activates Political Opposition:** In addition to the typical opposition from Conservative groups, this approach will activate opposition from teachers' groups, school administration associations, and the Minnesota Department of Education. These highly influential groups will oppose this approach because of its high implementation costs and the lack of flexibility it gives to students in their class schedules.
- **Faces Large Implementation Barriers:** Relatively few Minnesota schools already offer ethnic studies or have trained teachers, so the bill would need to provide significant funds and time for schools to implement the graduation requirement.
- **Most Direct Approach to Expanding Ethnic Studies Curriculum Statewide:** A mandate is the most straightforward way to ensure that Minnesota students are exposed to ethnic studies coursework
- **Raises Awareness:** Arguing that all students should be exposed to perspectives of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds could spark greater awareness about the need for more cultural responsiveness in Minnesota's curriculum.

*Infuse Ethnic Studies into Social Studies Standards Review Process*

[Statute 120B.021.4 - Revisions and reviews required](#)

Require that ethnic studies be infused into the process of revising the K-12 Social Studies Standards. Accomplish this by specifying that, "The commissioner must ensure that during the review and revision of the required academic social studies standards, the perspectives of racial and ethnic minority groups must be included at age-appropriate benchmarks where the learning objectives include greater understanding of economic, historical, social, or cultural issues in the U.S."

Note: The next review of the MN K-12 Social Studies standards will be during the 2020-21 school year.

- **Avoids Political and Implementation Barriers:** This approach would be implemented within the existing standards review process and timeline, reducing implementation costs. It's integration into an administrative process at the MN Department of Education also makes it unlikely to attract broad-based political opposition.

- **Diluted Impact on Ethnic Studies Curriculum:** Adding language to the existing social studies standards review process gives wide discretion to the 20 - 45-member advisory council as they revise a dense document of 100+ pages. These process hurdles will limit the impact on how social studies is taught unless there are other supports or accountability for teachers.
- **Low Potential to Raise Awareness:** This approach seeks policy change at the administrative level, which is unlikely to spark public interest or debate.

## **Potential Barriers to Enacting Ethnic Studies Legislation**

Based on our stakeholder interviews and national policy scan, we've identified these frequent counter-arguments against an ethnic studies curriculum, and the political actors that are most likely to advance these arguments. To increase the chance of legislative success, a good strategy would be to engage stakeholders identified as potential supporters to help develop messaging which refutes these arguments.

### **Criticisms of Cultural and Identity Politics**

- Ethnic studies teaches students of color to feel oppressed and resentful towards whites. It sows racial division when we need to move beyond identity politics.
- Ethnic studies erodes our common culture and unfairly prevents students from learning the canonical works of Western civilization.
- Mandating ethnic studies curriculum is government overreach and another attempt by Leftists to indoctrinate students with their political views.

### **Concerns over Student Schedule Flexibility and Implementation Challenges**

- Ethnic studies curriculum reduce flexibility in students' schedules, at a time when schools are struggling to make time for other neglected subject areas like arts and computer science.
- How can Minnesota's 96% white teacher workforce effectively teach the perspectives of ethnic minority groups?
- Where will the funding for statewide implementation come from?
- Teachers are already expected to do too much. We can't add more to their plate.

### **Criticism that Proposed Reforms Doesn't Go Far Enough**

Advocates of strong, progressive racial equity policies have expressed frustration with the lack of progress in educational achievement gaps and would rather see firm mandates than incremental policy changes.

- This bill is watered down and weak and won't make a difference for students of color.
- The process of developing this policy didn't do enough to engage communities of color or indigenous communities.

## **Potential Barriers to Implementation of Ethnic Studies Legislation**

Many states and localities that have implemented ethnic studies curricula or legislation have hit barriers in the implementation process, which delays the intended benefits of the policy from being realized and saps political will from allies. To avoid this fate, consider these implementation challenges throughout the process of developing the legislation, passing it through the legislature, and ushering it through implementation:

### **Lack of Teachers Trained in Ethnic Studies and Teachers of Color**

Only 4% of Minnesota teachers are people of color, and ethnic studies isn't a well-known academic field. This fact means that the success of ethnic studies curricula largely depends on the ability to train mostly white teachers so that they feel comfortable with the material and can teach it effectively, in both stand-alone and infusion models.

### **III-Defined and Contested Definition of Ethnic Studies**

Ethnic studies as an academic discipline can be broadly interpreted, which creates uncertainty among teachers and the possibility for inconsistent or weak implementation in classrooms. The legislation should advance a strong yet relatively flexible definition of ethnic studies and include mechanisms for supporting and monitoring implementation in schools.

### **Barriers to Student Enrollment: Inflexible Schedules and Requirements**

For students to take an ethnic studies course, they must 1) attend a school offering such a course, 2) be aware of and interested in taking that course, and 3) be able to fit the course into their schedule while still fulfilling all the other social studies credits and other graduation requirements. Yet even if students are aware of ethnic studies courses, they often struggle to fit them into their schedule, given the need to fulfill existing graduation requirements. Schools can help to remove these barriers, but often lack the capacity or funds to promote ethnic studies and align it with existing social studies standards.

## **Strategic Recommendations to Pass Ethnic Studies Legislation in Minnesota**

There are several key steps that need to be taken to strengthen the approach in pursuing ethnic studies legislation. These few steps should ensure that the proper stakeholders are brought into the conversation and their concerns are heard, so they can form a winning coalition.

**Build a Coalition:** Various organizations and individuals we spoke with are ready, willing, and able to work together with the legislature to move the ethnic studies conversation forward. It would be prudent to reach out to these stakeholders as soon as possible, in order to ensure they feel their input is heard at the earliest stage of the process. Several of these stakeholders are already regularly at the Capitol to testify, organize public support on specific days (Youth Day, Teacher Day, etc.) and have expressed willingness to take this issue on in their regular



work. Bringing together a diversity of stakeholders, from education nonprofits, school boards, principals, administrators, teachers, parents, and students, will send a powerful message of support for the bill.

**Create Public Awareness:** Use the skills and knowledge of the coalition of stakeholders above and to implement tactics that will build public awareness of ethnic studies and its benefits for students. Tactics like letters to the editor, interviews in local media, and direct engagement with local school officials will help spread awareness of this issue.

**Bipartisan Support:** There are several members of the legislature on both sides of the political divide and in both chambers that will likely be willing to be cosponsors of any ethnic studies bill and would guide the bill through the process. One place to start garnering support is through the Education Finance and Education Policy committees in each chamber. These members are already working on curriculum concerns, and by identifying and engaging with them early, any bill supporting ethnic studies in Minnesota can be communicated as a positive intervention in the achievement gap across the state.

**Research Funding Option:** The question of funding any legislation that encourages or requires ethnic studies in schools will likely be significant as the legislation moves forward. By working with House Research and the Office of the Revisor, the most optimal method of funding sources and potential for any existing program engagement can be found. These teams will also be able to more accurately estimate the cost to districts who want to pursue this curriculum.

## Conclusion

There are a number of strong options to pursuing ethnic studies legislation in Minnesota that will ideally have a positive impact on students in the state. However, the recommended approach has many significant benefits and addresses key needs of stakeholders. By pursuing our recommendation, there is a reason to believe that not only will the legislation find support and eventually be approved by the legislature and the next governor, but it will provide the first step towards further encouraging ethnic studies curriculum statewide.

## Appendices

### **Appendix A: Methodology**

The information for this report was gathered through research of primary sources related to ethnic studies legislation in other states and localities, secondary sources about ethnic studies, and informational interviews with 19 national and state stakeholders. Interviewees were contacted because of their involvement with existing ethnic studies programs, their national advocacy for ethnic studies, or because they are involved in Minnesota state education policy.

### **Appendix B: Summary of Existing K-12 Ethnic Studies Programs**

#### *Minneapolis Public School Ethnic Studies Program*

Minnesota Public Schools (MPS) has implemented ethnic studies stand-alone courses in high schools across the district since 2015. After the district cut down the social studies Human Geography class to half a year, Minneapolis Public School staff proposed filling the gap with ethnic studies history courses. The district then hired content experts for each course, such as African American history Professor Keith Mayes from the University of Minnesota, to develop the curriculum. MPS has pilot five different ethnic studies stand-alone history courses before rolling them out to high schools across the district. With a budget of \$200,000, the district originally hired two staff members to assist with content implementation and professional development. While teachers in the MPS ethnic studies program has seen anecdotal improvement in the engagement of students of color, the program is struggling to maintain momentum. Some schools are not prioritizing the classes due to low teacher preparation to teach the content and are creating barriers for students to enroll. For the program to be sustainable, it requires commitment from schools to increase access to courses and commitment from teachers to learn the content and receive training.

#### *Tucson, Arizona*

The Mexican-American Studies (MAS) program offered in Tucson's public schools (elementary, middle, and high school) was notable because it had been offered since 1998 and was an early example of an ethnic studies course. It became popular among students, with 1500 students enrolled in the courses at Tucson in 2010 - the last year the program was offered before the Arizona legislature banned the curriculum. The ensuing legal battle between ethnic studies advocates (driven by grassroots efforts from students and teachers) and the Arizona Superintendent of Education ended in 2017 when the US Court of Appeals 9th Circuit declared that the ban was unconstitutional on 1st and 14th Amendment grounds (free speech and equal protection clauses). Another important aspect of the Tucson MAS program is that evaluations of the program show positive outcomes, with students who took the course having a higher graduation rate and a lower dropout rate as compared to their peers who didn't take it.

### *California*

State Assembly Member Luis Alejo authored bill A.B. 2016, which directed the state's Instructional Quality Commission to develop, with participation from university faculty, teachers, and representatives from local educational agencies, a model curriculum for ethnic studies. The plan is required to be developed and implemented by the state's board before March 31, 2020, to be used in the 2020-2021 school year. The bill was developed over several years by Assembly Member Alejo, who used grassroots advocates from local districts in California who had already established local ethnic studies curriculum to ensure momentum at the capitol. The bill went through several iterations from 2015 until passing in 2016, many of which failed due to opposition to graduation requirements, funding concerns with the bill language, and original drafts which circumvented the Instructional Quality Commission, which caused Governor Jerry Brown to veto the bill.

### *Oregon*

The Oregon legislature passed a bill in June 2017 that required the development of an advisory group to recommend ethnic studies standards as part of the upcoming social studies standards review by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). The chief bill sponsor, Representative Diego Hernandez, used the momentum of student activism that helped pass ethnic studies in the Portland Public Schools to build a significant coalition of official endorsing organizations. The statewide bill encountered no opposition publicly and little opposition within the legislature, with some Republicans voting against the bill due to concerns about the inclusion of "social minorities" along with "ethnic minorities," and concerns about the creation of more standards when teachers already have limited social studies teaching time. The bill included \$43,149 in funding for a 0.25 FTE employee in the ODE to coordinate the advisory group. The bill provides specific guidelines about who the members of the advisory group should be, and the timeline for their recommendations and implementation within ODE. The ethnic studies law is in the beginning stages of implementation, with the creation of the advisory group currently underway.

### *Indiana*

In 2017, the State of Indiana adopted Senate Enrolled Act 337, which requires all high schools in the state to offer ethnic studies as an elective. The bill was championed by advocates from the state's NAACP chapter, who had previously advocated for a bill including a new graduation requirement for Black history and literature. However, the bill's authors and the NAACP loosened the graduation requirement and expanded the course options to include all ethnic studies options. The requirement started the next school year, 2017-2018.

### *Providence, Rhode Island*

Students in Providence, RI high schools started a petition at the start of the 2015 school year, asking for more access to ethnic studies courses. They eventually led to student protests in January 2016 of schools and administrative buildings. The district's interim Superintendent

joined the protest, and signed the petition, agreeing to students' requests. The district has since begun a pilot program in five high schools during the 2016-2017 school year, with intentions of rolling the program out to more schools in the future.

### **Appendix C: List of Stakeholders Interviewed**

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Contact Name and Title</i>
<a href="#"><u>Coalition of Asian American Leaders</u></a>	KaYing Yang, Director of Programs and Partnerships
<a href="#"><u>Critical Ethnic Studies Association</u></a>	Natchee Blu Barnd, Assistant Professor, Oregon State University
<a href="#"><u>EdAllies</u></a>	Josh Crosson, Senior Policy Director
<a href="#"><u>Education Evolving</u></a>	Krista Kaput, Policy and Research Manager
<a href="#"><u>Education Minnesota</u></a>	Carrie Lucking, Director of Policy, Outreach, and Research
<a href="#"><u>Educators for Excellence (E4E)</u></a>	Shannon Mitchell, Managing Director of External Relations
<a href="#"><u>Equity Alliance MN</u></a>	Cathryn Nakhornsak Mary Busman, Communications Coordinator / Program Logistics
Minneapolis Community and Technical College	Kleber Ortiz, Professor in the College of Education and former Minneapolis Public School 6-12 Program Facilitator – Social Studies
Minneapolis Public Schools	Courtney Bell, Teacher at North High School
<a href="#"><u>Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs</u></a>	Violeta Hernandez Espinosa, Policy Liaison
<a href="#"><u>Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)</u></a>	John Olson, Science Standards Specialist Doug Paulson, Acting Director of Academic Standards and Instructional Effectiveness Daron Korte, Assistant Commissioner
<a href="#"><u>Minnesota Educational Equity Partnership (MnEEP)</u></a>	Jonathan Hamilton, Former Director of Research
<a href="#"><u>MN Civic Youth</u></a>	Amy Anderson, Executive Director
<a href="#"><u>Minnesota Rural Education Association</u></a>	Sam Walseth, Contract Government Relations Representative
<a href="#"><u>National Association of Ethnic Studies (NAES)</u></a>	Julia Jordan-Zachery, President
<a href="#"><u>National Association of State Boards of Education</u></a>	Abby Potts, Director of College, Career, and Civic Readiness

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Contact Name and Title</i>
<a href="#">Oregon House of Representatives</a>	Representative Diego Hernandez, Representative
<a href="#">The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)</a>	Bette Tate Beaver, Executive Director
n/a	Sam Weiman, former coordinator for the Minneapolis Public Schools ethnic studies program

#### **Appendix D: Suggestions for Other Stakeholder Organizations to Engage**

[Black Lives Matter Minneapolis](#)

[ISAIAH](#)

[Minnesota Association of School Administrators](#)

[Minnesota Center for Social Studies Education](#)

[Minnesota Indian Affairs Council](#)

[Minnesota Indian Education Association](#)

[Minnesota PTA](#)

[Minnesota School Board Association](#)

[NAACP of Minnesota](#)

[Students for Education Reform Minnesota](#)

[Teach for America – Twin Cities](#)

[Teach Plus](#)

[The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage](#)

[The Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans](#)

[The Education Trust](#)

#### **Appendix E: Proposed Bill Language for Ethnic Studies Legislation**

The following proposed bill was developed by Minnesota House Research, in consultation with our team and Representative Lee in April 2018. It includes additional sections beyond our recommendation, on revising social studies standards and requesting the Professional Educator and Licensing Standards Board (PELSB) to review teacher preparation programs in Minnesota on their incorporation of ethnic studies. The proposed bill language will be reiterated with Representative Lee and other stakeholders.

- 1.1 A bill for an act
- 1.2 relating to education; ethnic studies; social studies standards; requiring a report;
- 1.3 appropriating money; amending Minnesota Statutes 2016, sections 120B.021,
- 1.4 subdivision 4; 120B.024, subdivision 2.
- 1.5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:
- 1.6 Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2016, section 120B.021, subdivision 4, is amended to read:

- 1.7 Subd. 4. **Revisions and reviews required.** (a) The commissioner of education must  
1.8 revise and appropriately embed technology and information literacy standards consistent  
1.9 with recommendations from school media specialists into the state's academic standards  
1.10 and graduation requirements and implement a ten-year cycle to review and, consistent with  
1.11 the review, revise state academic standards and related benchmarks, consistent with this  
1.12 subdivision. During each ten-year review and revision cycle, the commissioner also must  
1.13 examine the alignment of each required academic standard and related benchmark with the  
1.14 knowledge and skills students need for career and college readiness and advanced work in  
1.15 the particular subject area. The commissioner must include the contributions of Minnesota  
1.16 American Indian tribes and communities as related to the academic standards during the  
1.17 review and revision of the required academic standards.
- 1.18 (b) The commissioner must ensure that the statewide mathematics assessments  
1.19 administered to students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 are aligned with the state academic  
1.20 standards in mathematics, consistent with section 120B.30, subdivision 1, paragraph (b).  
1.21 The commissioner must implement a review of the academic standards and related  
1.22 benchmarks in mathematics beginning in the 2021-2022 school year and every ten years  
1.23 thereafter.
- 2.1 (c) The commissioner must implement a review of the academic standards and related  
2.2 benchmarks in arts beginning in the 2017-2018 school year and every ten years thereafter.
- 2.3 (d) The commissioner must implement a review of the academic standards and related  
2.4 benchmarks in science beginning in the 2018-2019 school year and every ten years thereafter.
- 2.5 (e) The commissioner must implement a review of the academic standards and related  
2.6 benchmarks in language arts beginning in the 2019-2020 school year and every ten years  
2.7 thereafter.
- 2.8 (f) The commissioner must implement a review of the academic standards and related  
2.9 benchmarks in social studies beginning in the 2020-2021 school year and every ten years  
2.10 thereafter. The commissioner must consider inclusion of ethnic studies and related  
2.11 benchmarks in the social studies standards reviewed beginning in the 2020-2021 school  
2.12 year. If the commissioner does not include ethnic studies academic standards and related  
2.13 benchmarks in the social studies standards, the commissioner must report to the committees  
2.14 of the legislature having jurisdiction over kindergarten through grade 12 education within  
2.15 six months of the adoption of the standards on why ethnic studies standards and benchmarks  
2.16 were not included.
- 2.17 (g) The commissioner must implement a review of the academic standards and related  
2.18 benchmarks in physical education beginning in the 2022-2023 school year and every ten  
2.19 years thereafter.
- 2.20 (h) School districts and charter schools must revise and align local academic standards  
2.21 and high school graduation requirements in health, world languages, and career and technical

- 2.22 education to require students to complete the revised standards beginning in a school year  
2.23 determined by the school district or charter school. School districts and charter schools must  
2.24 formally establish a periodic review cycle for the academic standards and related benchmarks  
2.25 in health, world languages, and career and technical education.
- 2.26 **EFFECTIVE DATE.** This section is effective the day following final enactment.
- 2.27 Sec. 2. Minnesota Statutes 2016, section 120B.024, subdivision 2, is amended to read:
- 2.28 Subd. 2. **Credit equivalencies.** (a) A one-half credit of economics taught in a school's  
2.29 agriculture education or business department may fulfill a one-half credit in social studies  
2.30 under subdivision 1, clause (5), if the credit is sufficient to satisfy all of the academic  
2.31 standards in economics. A one-half credit of ethnic studies that fulfills standards in citizenship  
2.32 and government, geography, and history may fulfill a one-half credit in social studies under  
2.33 subdivision 1, clause (5).
- 3.1 (b) An agriculture science or career and technical education credit may fulfill the elective  
3.2 science credit required under subdivision 1, clause (4), if the credit meets the state physical  
3.3 science, life science, earth and space science, chemistry, or physics academic standards or  
3.4 a combination of these academic standards as approved by the district. An agriculture or  
3.5 career and technical education credit may fulfill the credit in chemistry or physics required  
3.6 under subdivision 1, clause (4), if the credit meets the state chemistry or physics academic  
3.7 standards as approved by the district. A student must satisfy either all of the chemistry  
3.8 academic standards or all of the physics academic standards prior to graduation. An  
3.9 agriculture science or career and technical education credit may not fulfill the required  
3.10 biology credit under subdivision 1, clause (4).
- 3.11 (c) A career and technical education credit may fulfill a mathematics or arts credit  
3.12 requirement under subdivision 1, clause (2) or (6).
- 3.13 (d) An agriculture education teacher is not required to meet the requirements of Minnesota  
3.14 Rules, part 3505.1150, subpart 1, item B, to meet the credit equivalency requirements of  
3.15 paragraph (b) above.
- 3.16 (e) A computer science credit may fulfill a mathematics credit requirement under  
3.17 subdivision 1, clause (2), if the credit meets state academic standards in mathematics.
- 3.18 (f) A Project Lead the Way credit may fulfill a science or mathematics credit requirement  
3.19 under subdivision 1, clause (2) or (4), if the credit meets the state academic standards in  
3.20 science or mathematics.
- 3.21 **EFFECTIVE DATE.** This section is effective for the 2018-2019 school year and later.
- 3.22 Sec. 3. **SURVEY OF TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS.**

3.23 The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board must survey board-approved  
3.24 teacher preparation programs for teachers of elementary and secondary education to  
3.25 determine the extent of instruction on teaching ethnic studies offered by the programs. The  
3.26 board must report its findings to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative  
3.27 committees having jurisdiction over kindergarten through grade 12 education policy and  
3.28 finance by January 2, 2019. The report must include information on teacher preparation  
3.29 program instruction on ethnic studies. The report must be submitted in accordance with  
3.30 Minnesota Statutes, section 3.195.

3.31 **EFFECTIVE DATE.** This section is effective the day following final enactment.

4.1 Sec. 4. **APPROPRIATIONS.**

4.2 Subdivision 1. **Commissioner of education.** The sums indicated in this section are  
4.3 appropriated from the general fund to the commissioner of education for the specified  
4.4 purposes.

4.5 Subd. 2. **Ethnic studies pilot program.** (a) For competitive grants to at least three school  
4.6 districts, including at least one school district in greater Minnesota, to develop or expand  
4.7 ethnic studies courses across Minnesota:

4.8                \$                500,000       ..... 2019

4.9 (b) A school district applying for a grant under this subdivision must demonstrate a plan  
4.10 to:

4.11 (1) engage stakeholders, including students, parents, and teachers, to develop an ethnic  
4.12 studies curriculum relevant to the local community;

4.13 (2) identify resources, including experts in ethnic studies at postsecondary schools,  
4.14 community organizations, professional development opportunities, books, and other materials  
4.15 that may be used to develop the curriculum; and

4.16 (3) assess the development and implementation of an ethnic studies curriculum based  
4.17 on clear goals and accountability measures.

4.18 (c) A school district that receives a grant under this subdivision may use grant funds for:

4.19 (1) staffing and professional development opportunities for teachers and other school  
4.20 staff;

4.21 (2) books and other instructional materials; and



4.22      (3) field trips.

4.23      (d) A school district that receives a grant under this subdivision must report to the  
4.24 legislative committees having jurisdiction over kindergarten through grade 12 education  
4.25 on how it used funds awarded under this subdivision, recommendations for other school  
4.26 districts that wish to develop ethnic studies courses, including curriculum resources, and  
4.27 any measurable outcomes, including positive impacts on student learning and engagement.  
4.28 The report must be submitted by February 1, 2019.

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